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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 002391

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - DATES CHANGED IN PARA 1 AND PARA 5

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SUBJECT: INCHING TOWARD A PARLIAMENT

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The April 23 "rerun" of the elections for MP gave 17 more seats to the ruling Thai Rak Thai party, 9 seats to "microparties" and left 13 seats unfilled when single candidates did not meet the 20 percent minimum. In one constituency, voting could not be held when the election commission refused to work (reftel); results of the delayed vote are expected by tomorrow. The key to winning was to have an opponent - only 5 candidates running unopposed got more than the 20 percent minimum. The Election Commission has announced one more round of voting on April 29, and is permitting new candidates to register on April 26 and 27. Depending on how many more microparty candidates come out of the woodwork, the EC may be able to whittle down the number of empty seats still further. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) After another grueling round of elections, there are still 13 unfilled seats in the Parliament. (All results are based on press reports, since the EC has not announced official results, but the numbers are probably basically correct). TRT picked up 17 more seats. This included two re-runs in the central part of the country; in both of these districts, TRT narrowly outpolled the "no" vote. In 5 constituencies where it was running unopposed, including 4 in the South, TRT got past the twenty percent minimum (just barely in several cases) although it did not outpoll "no vote" plus spoiled ballots. In the other constituencies, TRT had opponents and so was able to win, but in many cases, with low support. In Phukhet, for example, TRT won with 8,000 votes, but there were 30,000 "no votes." In Songkhla, TRT won one seat with 8,600 votes vs. 50,000 "no votes." The key to winning was to have an opponent, and thus evade the 20 percent minimum.

¶3. (C) The new parliament will also have an opposition. 9 microparties won seats in the second round, including all the constituencies in Krabi and one seat each in Phetchaburi and Prachuab Khiri Khan (the most northerly southern provinces.) The Phlang Prachachon party won 5 seats (in Krabi and Trang); The People's Party for Debt Forgiveness won three (in Narathiwat, Phetchaburi and Phatthalung) and Prachakon Thai won one (in Prachuab). They will join the one non-TRT member to win in the first round, a "Debt Forgiveness" party member from Nakhon Si Thammarat (who got less than 4,000 votes to beat a TRT opponent.) The other parties' platforms are not well-known yet, but the earlier winner from the "Debt Forgiveness" party told the press that he wanted the government to stop funding megaprojects and use the money to pay off rural debt instead.

¶4. (C) This leaves 13 unfilled seats in the southern provinces. TRT has taken most of the seats in the far south (Narathiwat, Yala and Songkhla) in almost every case by beating a microparty opponent. Two seats in Pattani will be contested in the next round, with the rest of the 13 scattered around the South.

¶5. (C) The Election Commission announced Monday evening that it would hold a final round of votes on Saturday April 29, and it would re-open registration for new candidates on Wednesday and Thursday. This last stroke from the EC might enable it to fill all or almost all the constituency seats. There will be almost no time for challenges to these candidates before Sunday's vote. Even if the microparty candidates are later disqualified, as hundreds of would-be candidates have been so far, it may not matter much. Once the vote is over and the EC has certified the results, the parliament can be seated and proceed with business. Even if a candidate is subsequently disqualified, the worst likely result is a by-election, conducted safely after the Parliament is in session. The new parliament will still come up short, as TRT won all the party list seats, but is one person short of the 100 required, after one candidate joined the monkhood. The Constitutional Court will probably still have to rule on the opening of the truncated parliament, but the fewer the vacant seats, the more palatable it will be to allow the Parliament to open.

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